

## BEWARE! Three Common Writing Traps

Avoiding these common writing traps can produce easy to understand narrative that requires less effort from your reader. Clean narrative keeps readers engaged and helps them quickly find the information they need to score your proposal. Removing these writing traps from your narrative can be a space (and life!) saver when you are facing page, word, or character limits. In avoiding writing traps, a thesaurus can be a writer's best friend.



### ➤ Active v. passive voice

"Active voice" is when the subject is doing the action described by the verb. In "passive voice," the subject is having something done to it. Passive voice can sound vague, buries the subject, and softens the action.

Active voice has a snappier, more forward sound. The word "by" and the presence of "be" verbs (is, are, being, was, will be) often signal passive voice.

Space  
Saver!

Passive: Testing **is** provided **by** qualified, licensed staff. (7 words, 49 characters)

Active: Qualified, licensed staff provide testing. (5 words, 42 characters)

Passive: Two hundred clients **were** recruited **by** agency outreach staff in 2009. (11 words, 68 characters)

Active: Agency outreach staff recruited 200 clients in 2009. (8 words, 52 characters)

### ➤ Fluffy phrases

Writing formally simply means communicating in a professional manner with someone we don't know well personally. Writers often fall into the trap of using extra words and stuffy writing to sound formal and smart. Fluffy phrases add unnecessary bulk to your writing—without adding enhanced meaning. Winnowing this excess can make narrative nimbler and ultimately more interesting. Look for "be" verbs; words like "of," "with," and "who," and words ending in "-ing" or "-ed."

Space  
Saver!

Fluffy Phrase	A Better Choice
have a tendency to	tend to
is indicative of	shows, illustrates
are in need of	need
make contact with	contact
gives rise to	results in (can often be cut altogether)
has the effect of making, gives rise to	makes, causes, renders
in order to	to
the patients who are located in	patients in
additionally, also, in addition to, currently	(can often be cut altogether)
There are some patients who are	Some patients
In regards to, concerning, with respect to	about, on, for (can often be cut altogether)
the recruiting of clients	client recruitment

### ➤ Hyperbole and overstatement

Zeal for our work can propel us to make broad overstatements. Hyperbole is a sure sign that you have left the world of expository writing, have ventured into marketing language, and wish to elicit an emotional response. The claim is something you cannot prove to be true or would be hard-pressed to prove if asked for supporting data.

*Danger words!*

- |          |                     |                                 |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| ✓ Only   | ✓ Unique            | ✓ Sole                          |
| ✓ Always | ✓ Completely unique | ✓ In the entire service area    |
| ✓ Never  | ✓ Most              | ✓ Any adjective ending in "est" |

Statement	Problem
Without the help of the AIDS Foundation of Dallas County, none of these individuals will have the medical are they need.	This is rather presumptive and not able to be proved.
The Brazos County Health Center helps the poorest, sickest people in the County.	Can only be true if everyone in the County has a medical exam and is screened for income. Plus, it's a rather disrespectful way to talk about clients.

## You're the Editor!

The narrative below needs your help! Read each sentence and circle the words that indicate the writer has fallen into a trap. Rewrite each sentence so that it is active, clear, and reasonable.

**Example #1:** Clients who are in need of services are provided with these services by a multidisciplinary team.

**Correction:** Clients receive services from a multidisciplinary team.

**Correction:** A multidisciplinary protection team provides services to clients.

**Example #2:** The clients who are located in the rural counties frequently have a tendency to have issues in regards to transportation.

**Correction:** Clients in rural counties often have transportation issues.



### *It's Your Turn!*

1. In order to medical meet the needs of clients who are residing in rural areas, which gives rise to transportation problems, case managers make contact with the local CARTS program.

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2. Testing for HIV/STDs is offered by medical staff at no cost to clients who are the poorest people in the county and would otherwise never know their status without this service.

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3. The Tarrant County Health Center provides a service that is completely unique in the county, with no other resource for free, rapid HIV testing in the entire service area.

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